

Peoria Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
September 22, 2018
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This opening program of the Peoria Symphony Orchestra's season features the distinguished violinist Catherine Cho, who performs a Romantic virtuoso showpiece by Max Bruch, the *Scottish Fantasy*. Framing her performance are a pair of works by Bruch's great Bohemian contemporary, Antonín Dvorák: the sparkling *Carnival Overture*, and the finest of his symphonies, the profound seventh.

Antonín Dvorák (1841-1904)
Carnival Overture, Op.92

Dvorák completed this work in the summer of 1891. He conducted its premiere in Prague on April 28, 1892. Duration 9:00.

This lively piece was the second of a three-overture set (originally titled *Nature, Life, and Love*), and Dvorák's original intention was that the three were to be presented together, as a three-movement symphonic poem depicting different aspects of "...Nature, and her powers for good and evil." This original conception was apparently unsatisfying, and Dvorák eventually settled upon the titles *In Nature's Realm* (Op.91), *Carnival* (Op.92), and *Othello* (Op.93). He conducted all three overtures at a grand farewell concert in Prague, just before he left for an extended stay in America. And they appeared together again a program in Carnegie Hall that October marking his welcome to New York City. Of the three, *Carnival* is the most frequently heard today, an exuberant example of Dvorák's mature style.

The overture is set in sonata form, with the impetuous first theme laid out in the opening bars by full orchestra. A distinctly Bohemian flavor comes through in the strongly rhythmic nature of Dvorák's material. A brief transition leads into the expressive second theme, sung by the strings, with woodwind echoes. The exposition closes with a return to boisterous mood of the opening. Before developing this material, Dvorák breaks the irresistible momentum with a gentle pastoral episode that features solo English horn, flute, and clarinet. (The clarinet's pastoral melody also appears in the other two overtures of this set.) When the development section intrudes on this calm mood, it is in a minor key, with strings in almost constant motion above ominous trombone lines. Dvorák gradually creates a sense of expectation until inevitably returning to the opening theme in an abbreviated recapitulation and a brilliant coda.

Max Bruch (1838-1920)

Scottish Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra, Op.46

Bruch composed his Scottish Fantasy in the winter of 1879-1880, and it was first performed in September 1880, with Pablo de Sarasate as soloist. Previous Madison Symphony Orchestra performances have featured Norman Paulu (1987) and Shlomo Mintz (1992). Duration 30:00.

The land and culture of Scotland were an exotic source of inspiration for German Romantics like Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Bruch. Bruch in particular was a confirmed Scotophile, reading novels of Sir Walter Scott (in German translations), and setting to music several Scots poems by Robert Burns. The characteristic rhythmic snap of Scottish music pervades Mendelssohn's third symphony and its influence can be heard in songs by Beethoven and Schumann, but Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* goes a step further. Bruch was always fascinated by folk material, and used authentic Scottish folk melodies as his themes—the full title is “Fantasy for violin with orchestra and harp, with the free use of Scottish folk melodies.” It is occasionally suggested that Bruch himself collected the tunes. While he may indeed have heard Scottish music on a trip through Scotland, the source seems to be a handy reference book, *The Scots Musical Museum*, a widely-known collection of tunes assembled by Robert Burns and Stephen Clarke in the late 18th century. As a more subtle evocation of Scottish traditional music, Bruch also uses the harp prominently throughout the work. The *Scottish Fantasy* was composed for, and dedicated to the virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate.

The introduction (*Grave*) opens with a somber trombone chorale, and a free recitative for the soloist. This prologue leads to the body of the first movement (*Adagio cantabile*), where the violin plays a flowing adaptation of the tune *Auld Rob Morris* above a background of muted strings. The solo line builds to a subdued climax near the end, but soon subsides to end the movement quietly. The second movement (*Allegro*) begins with fragments of what will become the main theme. This theme, first played in its entirety by the violin, is based on the dance tune *The Dusty Miller*. The soloist begins with a very straightforward setting of the tune over a simple drone accompaniment, an evocation of country fiddling that soon expands to a more virtuoso style of playing. The orchestra takes up the theme, and the rest of the movement continues as a lively dialogue. At the end of this movement, there is a brief reminiscence of *Auld Rob Morris*, which provides a bridge into the lyrical *Allegro sostenuto*. This third, and most song-like movement is based upon the bittersweet lament *I'm a Doun for the Lack o'Johnnie*. It begins with a direct presentation of the tune, but the solo line becomes more and more agitated until there is a sharp shift of mood and tempo in the movement's central section. The opening theme returns at the end for a final section of development. The

finale (*Allegro guerrico*) begins with a strident theme, the Scots war-song *Scots Wha Hae*—Burns’s adaptation of Robert the Bruce’s legendary address to Scottish troops before the Battle of Bannockburn (1314):

*Scots, wha hae wi’ Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led;
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victory!*

This tune is stated by the violin, and answered by the full orchestra. A contrasting idea, which will alternate with *Scots Wha Hae* throughout the movement, is introduced in the same manner. After a brief pause, the solo violin launches into a virtuoso variation of the main theme. There is a central *tranquillo* episode that returns almost to the mood of the third movement, but the orchestra forcefully reasserts the warlike nature of the movement’s opening bars. The violin’s line culminates in a brilliant solo cadenza, and the movement closes with a final statement of the warlike main theme.

Antonín Dvorák **Symphony No.7 in D minor, Op. 70**

Dvorák composed his symphony in 1884-85 and he conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the premiere, on March 17, 1885. Our only previous performance of the symphony was in 1987. Duration: 36:00.

In December 1884, Dvorák wrote to a friend: “I am now busy with the new symphony (for London), and wherever I go, I have no thought for anything but my work, which much be such as to move the world—God grant that it be so!” He was describing the composition of his seventh symphony, generally considered to be his finest symphonic work. Earlier that year, he made the first of eight successful visits to England. English audiences adored his music, and shortly after arriving he was named an honorary member of the London Philharmonic Society. This honor came with a commission for a new symphony. Though this was his major reason for writing the *Symphony No.7*, there were several other factors at work as well. He had been deeply moved by the premiere of Brahms’s third symphony in 1883, and it is clear that he wanted to respond in a musical way to this work by his mentor and friend; his letters and diaries from this period speak of wanting to live up to Brahms’s confidence in him and to produce a work of similar depth. There are even musical clues that in some sense the *Symphony No.7* is a “symphony about Brahms”—its musical forms, its intense thematic development, and the rhythmic quirks of the third and fourth movements all pay tribute to Dvorák’s mentor. What is put in the background in this work—aside from the third movement—

are the Czech musical styles that had played such an important part in his *Slavonic Dances* and earlier symphonies. It seems that though Dvorák remained a strong Bohemian patriot, he was trying to break out of the nationalist mold he had created in so much of his earlier music.

The symphony's reception in London was everything Dvorák could have hoped for, and after a few revisions, he sent it off to his publisher Simrock. In his long years struggling for recognition, the contract with Simrock (acquired with the help of Brahms) had been a blessing, though Simrock had also profited enormously by publishing popular pieces like the *Slavonic Dances*. Now, Dvorák was finally in a position to bargain. Simrock offered 3000 marks for the symphony, but Dvorák stood his ground until the publisher doubled his price. The score was published by Simrock in 1885 as the *Symphony No.2*. Its present numbering—*No.7*—reflects its actual place in the composition of Dvorák's symphonies.

The first movement (*Allegro maestoso*) begins with a brooding melody in the low strings that is the basis for several later ideas. A horn call and a woodwind passage announce a contrasting major-key melody played by the flute and clarinet. After is a short, but intense development section, before Dvorák recapitulates the main ideas—though in reverse order: the second theme returns first in a flowing clarinet solo before he finally returns to the tragic mood of the opening.

A melancholy clarinet solo above *pizzicato* strings opens the second movement (*Poco adagio*). This is answered by the strings and other solo woodwinds, building to a related idea that critic Donald Tovey once called "one of the profoundest in any symphony since Beethoven." A final, more pastoral theme is introduced by the horns. All three melodies find their way into the development before Dvorák restates them, and ends the movement with a final statement of the opening idea, now in the oboe above string tremolos, and a quiet epilogue.

While the second movement probably shows Dvorák at his most "Brahmsian," the scherzo (*Vivace*) hearkens back his Bohemian roots. The opening dance has the feel of a *furiant*, a fast Czech folk dance much used by Dvorák. However, he introduces one of Brahms's favorite rhythmic devices, pitting triple-meter melody against a duple-meter accompaniment. The central trio changes the character briefly, with solo woodwinds above, before the opening mood returns. There is one more brief slow episode before he closes with a furious coda.

The finale (*Allegro*) begins with a long, moody introduction that builds intensity until Dvorák introduces a forceful off-beat main idea. From this point the movement has an

unstoppable rhythmic energy. There are occasional breaks in the intensity, but the mood remains tempestuous throughout, culminating in a fierce coda.

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